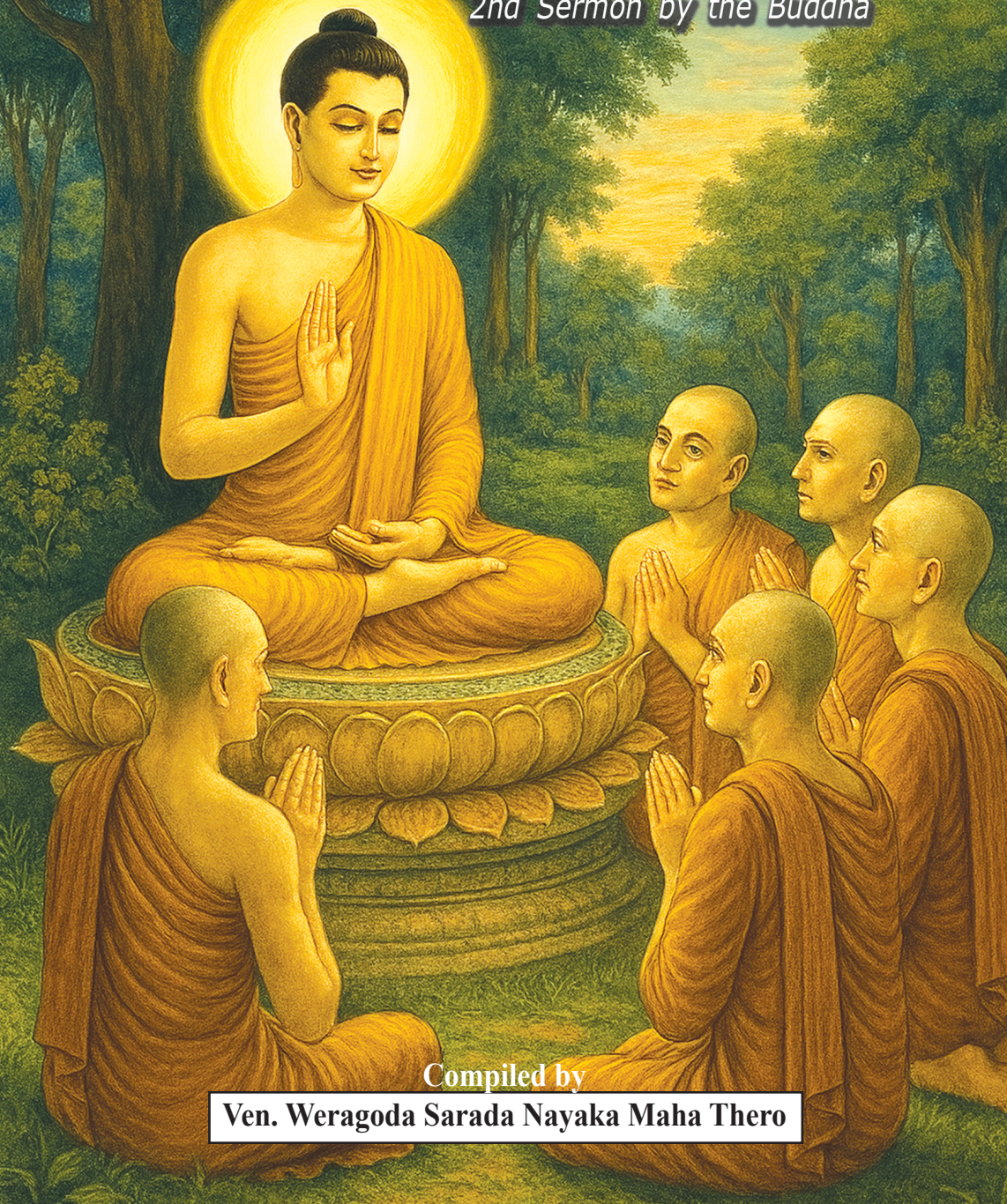


Anattalakkhana Sutta

(The Characteristics of Not-Self)

2nd Sermon by the Buddha



Compiled by

Ven. Weragoda Sarada Nayaka Maha Thero

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Homage and Dedication

To my revered teacher,
Most Venerable Weragoda Sarada Nāyaka Mahā Thero,
Chief Prelate of Singapore,

Who turned me toward the Noble Path,
Who showed it with clarity,
Who spoke it with compassion,
Who lives it with unwavering serenity—
On the sacred occasion of his 84th birth anniversary,
I respectfully publish and dedicate
this revered book titled
“Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta,”
with folded palms and boundless gratitude.

May my teacher be blessed with
courage to continue the noble mission,
strength to uplift the world with Dhamma,
and health and serenity to walk the path in peace.

Rev. Weragoda Sunanda
27. 11. 2025

Anattalakkhana Sutta

The Characteristics of Not-Self

Evaṃ me sutam:

**Ekam samayaṃ bhagavā Bārāṇasiyaṃ
viharati Isipatane migadāye. tatra kho
bhagavā pañcavaggiye bhikkhū
āmantesi: bhikkhavo ti. Bhadante ti te
bhikkhū bhagavato paccassosum,
Bhagavā etad'avoca:**

At one time the Buddha was staying near Varanasi, in the deer park at Isipatana. There the Buddha addressed the group of five monks:

“O Monks!”

“Venerable sir,” they replied. The Buddha said this:

**Rūpaṃ, bhikkhave, anattā. rūpañca
hidaṃ, bhikkhave, attā abhaviṣṣa,
nayidaṃ rūpaṃ ābādhāya saṃvatteyya,
labbhettha ca rūpe: ‘evaṃ me rūpaṃ
hotu, evaṃ me rūpaṃ mā ahoṣī’ti.**

**Yasmā ca kho, bhikkhave, rūpaṃ
anattā, tasmā rūpaṃ ābādhāya
saṃvattati, na ca labbhati rūpe: ‘evaṃ
me rūpaṃ hotu, evaṃ me rūpaṃ mā
ahosī’ti.**

“Monks, form is not-self. For if form were self, it wouldn’t lead to affliction. And you could compel form: ‘May my form be like this! May it not be like that!’

But because form is not-self, it leads to affliction. And you can’t compel form: ‘May my form be like this! May it not be like that!’

**Vedanā bhikkhave anattā. Vedanā cā
yaṃ, bhikkhave, attā abhavissa, na cā
yaṃ vedanā ābādhāya saṃvatteyya,
labbhetha ca vedanāya: ‘evaṃ me
vedanā hotu, evaṃ me vedanā mā
ahosī’ti.**

**Yasmā ca kho, bhikkhave, vedanā
anattā, tasmā vedanā ābādhāya
saṃvattati, na ca labbhati vedanāya:**

**‘evaṃ me vedanā hotu, evaṃ me
vedanā mā ahoṣī’ti.**

“Monks, feeling is not-self. For if feeling were self, it wouldn’t lead to affliction. And you could compel feeling: ‘May my feeling be like this! May it not be like that!’

But because feeling is not-self, it leads to affliction. And you can’t compel feeling: ‘May my feeling be like this! May it not be like that!’

**Saññā bhikkhave, anattā, saññā cā yaṃ
bhikkhave, attā abhaviṣṣa na cā yaṃ
saññā ābādhāya saṃvatteyya,
labbheṭṭha ca saññā ya: ‘evaṃ me saññā
hotu, evaṃ me saññā mā ahoṣī’ti.**

**Yasmā ca kho bhikkhave, saññā
anattā, tasmā saññā ābādhāya
saṃvattati, na ca labbhati saññā ya:
‘evaṃ me saññā hotu, evaṃ me saññā
mā ahoṣī’ti.**

“Monks, perception is not-self. For if perception were self, it wouldn’t lead to affliction. And you could

compel perception: ‘May my perception be like this!
May it not be like that!’

But because perception is not-self, it leads to affliction. And you can’t compel perception: ‘May my perception be like this! May it not be like that!’

**saṅkhārā bhikkhave, anattā, saṅkhārā
ca ime bhikkhave, attā abhavissaṃsu na
ca me saṅkhārā ābādhāya
saṃvatteyyuṃ, labbhettha ca
saṅkhāresu: ‘evaṃ me saṅkhārā hontu,
evaṃ me saṅkhārā mā ahesun’ti.**

**Yasmā ca kho bhikkhave, saṅkhāraṃ
anattā, tasmā saṅkhārā ābādhāya
saṃvattanti, na ca labbhati saṅkhāresu:
‘evaṃ me saṅkhārā hontu, evaṃ me
saṅkhārā mā ahesun’ti.**

“Monks, mental formations are not-self ... For if mental formations were self, it wouldn’t lead to affliction. And you could compel mental formations: ‘May my mental formations be like this! May it not be like that!’

But because mental formation is not-self, it leads to affliction. And you can't compel mental formation: 'May my mental formation be like this! May it not be like that!'

**Viññāṇaṃ bhikkhave, anattā,
viññāṇaṃca idaṃ bhikkhave, attā
abhavissa na idaṃ viññāṇaṃ
ābādhāya saṃvatteyya, labbheṭṭha ca
viññāṇe: 'evaṃ me viññāṇaṃ hotu,
evaṃ me viññāṇaṃ mā ahoṣī'ti.**

**Yasmā ca kho bhikkhave, viññāṇaṃ
anattā, tasmā viññāṇaṃ ābādhāya
saṃvattati, na ca labbhati viññāṇe:
'evaṃ me viññāṇaṃ hotu, evaṃ me
viññāṇaṃ mā ahoṣī'ti.**

"Monks, Consciousness is not-self. For if consciousness were self, it wouldn't lead to affliction. And you could compel consciousness: 'May my consciousness be like this! May it not be like that!'

But because consciousness is not-self, it leads to affliction. And you can't compel consciousness:

‘May my consciousness be like this! May it not be like that!’

**Taṃ kiṃ maññatha, bhikkhave: rūpaṃ
niccaṃ vā aniccaṃ vā ti?**

What do you think, Monks? Is form permanent or impermanent?”

Aniccaṃ, bhante.

“Impermanent, sir.”

**Yaṃ paṇāniccaṃ dukkhaṃ vā taṃ
sukhaṃ vā ti?**

“But if it’s impermanent, is it suffering or happiness?”

Dukkhaṃ, bhante.

“Suffering, sir.”

**Yaṃ paṇāniccaṃ dukkhaṃ vipariṇāma
dhammaṃ, kallaṃ nu taṃ
samanupassitum: ‘etaṃ mama,
esohamasmi, eso me attā’ti?**

“But if it’s impermanent, suffering, and perishable, is it fit to be regarded thus: ‘This is mine, I am this, this is my self’?”

No hetam, bhante.

“No, sir.”

**Tam kiṃ maññatha, bhikkhave:
Vedanā niccā vā aniccā vā ti?**

“Is feeling permanent or impermanent?” ...

Aniccā, bhante.

“Impermanent, sir.”

**Yaṃ panāniccam dukkham vā taṃ
sukham vā ti?**

“But if it’s impermanent, is it suffering or happiness?”

Dukkham, bhante.

“Suffering, sir.”

**Yaṃ panāniccam dukkham vipariṇāma
dhammam, kalam nu taṃ**

**samanupassitum: ‘etaṃ mama,
esohamasmi, eso me attā’ti?**

“But if it’s impermanent, suffering, and perishable,
is it fit to be regarded thus: ‘This is mine, I am this,
this is my self’?”

No hetam, bhante.

“No, sir.”

**Taṃ kiṃ maññatha, bhikkhave: Saññā
niccā vā aniccā vā ti?**

“Is perception permanent or impermanent?” ...

Aniccā, bhante.

“Impermanent, sir.”

**Yaṃ panāniccam dukkhaṃ vā taṃ
sukhaṃ vā ti?**

“But if it’s impermanent, is it suffering or
happiness?”

Dukkhaṃ, bhante.

“Suffering, sir.”

**Yaṃ paṇāniccaṃ dukkhaṃ
vipariṇāmadhammaṃ, kallaṃ nu taṃ
samanupassituṃ: ‘etaṃ mama,
esohamasmi, eso me attā’ti?**

“But if it’s impermanent, suffering, and perishable, is it fit to be regarded thus: ‘This is mine, I am this, this is my self’?”

No hetaṃ, bhante.

“No, sir.”

**Taṃ kiṃ maññatha, bhikkhave:
Saṅkhārā niccā vā aniccā vā ti?**

“Are choices permanent or impermanent?” ...

Aniccā, bhante.

“Impermanent, sir.”

**Yaṃ paṇāniccaṃ dukkhaṃ vā taṃ sukhaṃ
vā ti?**

“But if it’s impermanent, is it suffering or happiness?”

Dukkhaṃ, bhante.

“Suffering, sir.”

**Yaṃ paṇāniccaṃ dukkhaṃ
vipariṇāmadhammaṃ, kallaṃ nu taṃ
samanupassituṃ: ‘etaṃ mama,
esohamasmi, eso me attā’ti?**

“But if it’s impermanent, suffering, and perishable, is it fit to be regarded thus: ‘This is mine, I am this, this is my self’?”

No hetam, bhante.

“No, sir.”

**Taṃ kiṃ maññatha, bhikkhave:
Viññāṇaṃ niccaṃ vā aniccaṃ vā ti?**

“Are choices permanent or impermanent?” ...

Aniccaṃ, bhante.

“Impermanent, sir.”

**Yaṃ paṇāniccaṃ dukkhaṃ vā taṃ
sukhaṃ vā ti?**

“But if it’s impermanent, is it suffering or happiness?”

Dukkhaṃ, bhante.

“Suffering, sir.”

**Yaṃ paṇāniccaṃ dukkhaṃ
vipariṇāmadhammaṃ, kallaṃ nu taṃ
samanupassituṃ: ‘etaṃ mama,
esohamasmi, eso me attā’ti?**

“But if it’s impermanent, suffering, and perishable, is it fit to be regarded thus: ‘This is mine, I am this, this is my self’?”

No hetuṃ, bhante.

“No, sir.”

**Tasmāti, bhikkhave, yaṃ kiñci rūpaṃ
atītānāgatapaccuppannaṃ ajjhattaṃ vā
bahiddhā vā oḷārikaṃ vā sukhumāṃ vā
hīnaṃ vā paṇītaṃ vā yaṃ dūre santike
vā,**

**sabbaṃ rūpaṃ ‘netuṃ mama,
nesohamasmi, na meso attā’ti**

**evametaṃ yathābhūtaṃ
sammappaññāya daṭṭhabbaṃ.**

“So you should truly see any kind of form at all—past, future, or present; internal or external; solid or subtle; inferior or superior; far or near: all form—with right understanding: ‘This is not mine, I am not this, this is not my self.’

**Yā kāci vedanā
atītānāgatapaccuppannā ajjhataṃ vā
bahiddhā vā oḷārikā vā sukhumā vā
hīnā vā paṇītā vā, yaṃ dūre santike vā
sabbā vedanā ‘netam mama,
nesohamasmi, na meso attā’ti
evametaṃ yathābhūtaṃ
sammappaññāya daṭṭhabbaṃ.**

Any kind of feeling at all ... past, future, or present; internal or external; solid or subtle; inferior or superior; far or near: all feeling —with right understanding: ‘This is not mine, I am not this, this is not myself.’

**Yā kāci saññā atītānāgatapaccuppanā,
ajjhata vā bahiddhā vā oḷārikā vā
sukhumā vā hīnā vā pañitā vā, yaṃ
dūre santike vā sabbam saññā ‘netam
mama, nesohamasmi, na meso attā’ti
evametaṃ yathābhūtaṃ
sammappaññāya daṭṭhabbam**

Any kind of perception at all ... past, future, or present; internal or external; solid or subtle; inferior or superior; far or near; all perception —with right understanding: ‘This is not mine, I am not this, this is not myself.’

**Ye keci saṅkhārā
atītānāgatapaccuppanā, ajjhata vā
bahiddhā vā oḷārikā vā sukhumā vā
hīnā vā pañitā vā, yaṃ dūre santike vā
sabbe saṅkhārā ‘netam mama,
nesohamasmi, na meso attā’ti
evametaṃ yathābhūtaṃ
sammappaññāya daṭṭhabbam.**

Any kind of mental formations at all ... past, future, or present; internal or external; solid or subtle; inferior or superior; far or near: all mental formations—with right understanding: ‘This is not mine, I am not this, this is not myself.’

**Yaṃ kiñci viññāṇaṃ
atītānāgatapaccuppannaṃ, ajjhataṃ
vā bahiddhā vā oḷārikaṃ vā sukhumāṃ
vā hīnaṃ vā paṇītaṃ vā, yaṃ dūre
santike vā sabbāṃ viññāṇaṃ ‘netāṃ
mama, nesohamasmi, na meso attā’ti
evameva yathābhūtaṃ
sammappaññāya daṭṭhabbaṃ.**

You should truly see any kind of consciousness at all—past, future, or present; internal or external; solid or subtle; inferior or superior; far or near; all consciousness—with right understanding: ‘This is not mine, I am not this, this is not myself.’

**Evāṃ passaṃ, bhikkhave, sutavā
ariyasāvako rūpasmim·pi nibbindati,
vedanāyapi nibbindati, saññāyapi
nibbindati, saṅkhāresupi nibbindati,**

**viññāṇasmimpi nibbindati. Nibbindaṃ
virajjati. Virāgā vimuccati.
Vimuttasmiṃ ‘vimuttami’ti ñāṇaṃ hoti.
‘Khīṇa jāti, vusitaṃ brahmacariyaṃ,
kataṃ karaṇīyaṃ, nāparaṃ
itthattāyā’ti pajānātī·ti.**

Seeing this, a learned noble disciple grows disillusioned with form, feeling, perception, choices, and consciousness. Being disillusioned, desire fades away. When desire fades away they’re freed. When they’re freed, they know they’re freed. They understand: ‘Rebirth is ended, the spiritual journey has been completed, what had to be done has been done, there is nothing further for this place.’”

**Idamavoca bhagavā. Attamanā
pañcavaggiyā bhikkhū bhagavato
bhāsitāṃ abhinandaṃ.**

That is what the Buddha said. Satisfied, the group of five Monks approved what the Buddha said.

**Imasmiñca pana veyyākaraṇasmiṃ
bhaññaṃāne pañcavaggiyānaṃ**

**bhikkhūnaṃ anupādāya āsavehi cittāni
vimuccim̐sūti.**

And while this discourse was being spoken, the minds
of the group of five Monks were freed from
defilements by not grasping.



Anattalakkhana Sutta **Explanation**

At **Isipatana Migadāya** in **Bārāṇasī**, on the first day after hearing the **Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta**, the Venerable **Koṇḍañña** attained **Sotāpanna**—the first stage of awakening.

On the second day, **Vappa** followed. Then **Bhaddiya**, **Mahānāma**, and **Assaji**—each of the five ascetics—listened in turn to the Blessed One’s discourse and attained the noble fruit of **Sotāpanna**.

The Blessed One then gathered all five together and delivered the sublime **Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta** at this (same) sacred site.

By the end of that discourse, all five attained **Arahantship**—complete liberation.

A Buddha arises in the world to reveal the Three Characteristics—impermanence (**anicca**), suffering (**dukkha**), and non-self (**anattā**)—which have been obscured by ignorance (**avijjā**). The sublime Dhamma, hidden by delusion, is brought forth and illuminated for the world.

In one discourse, the Blessed One declares: “Bhikkhus, a Buddha does not arise in the world merely to instruct people in morality (**sīla**).”

You know that universal monarchs (**cakkavatti rājā**) appear in the world. Even they, surrounded by their fourfold armies, can descend from the sky and proclaim moral conduct, encouraging the entire world to live virtuously. Kings themselves are capable of promoting morality.

Next, the Blessed One teaches: “A Buddha does not arise in the world merely to teach **samādhi** (mental concentration).”

Before the arising of a Buddha, teachers like **Āḷāra Kālāma** and **Uddaka Rāmaputta** already mastered deep states of formless absorption:

- The Sphere of Infinite Space (**ākāsānañcāyatana**)
- The Sphere of Infinite Consciousness (**viññāṇañcāyatana**)
- The Sphere of Nothingness (**ākīñcaṇṇāyatana**)
- The Sphere of Neither Perception nor Non-Perception (**nevasaññānāsaññāyatana**)

Such refined mental cultivation existed even then, and people developed remarkable meditative powers—some could even travel through the sky using spiritual abilities (**iddhi**).”

Therefore, a Buddha arises in the world to reveal the true nature of reality—
To dispel ignorance and craving,

To uncover the Three Characteristics:
impermanence, suffering, and non-self,
To illuminate the profound Dhamma,
And to show the path that leads to liberation from all
suffering.

At that time, the five ascetics had already attained the
fruit of **Sotāpanna** (stream-entry).

The Blessed One gathered all five together and, at
that sacred site—**Isipatana Migadāya**, He delivered
a profoundly sublime discourse on the nature of non-
self (**anattā**).

The Blessed One begins this discourse in the
following way:

“Monks, this *form* (**rūpa**) is non-self (**anattā**). What
does ‘non-self’ mean? It means that this *form* cannot
be controlled by oneself. One cannot maintain it as
one wishes.”

Let us first understand what is meant by *form*. *Form*
refers to this body, which arises from the four great
elements—earth, water, fire, and air.

The Blessed One gives a beautiful analogy to explain
form. Imagine we place four wooden pillars—one on
each side. Then we add a roof beam, windows, and
walls made of clay and wood. After binding

everything together and covering it with a roof, we call it a *house*. But we don't refer to it as pillars, or clay, or windows, or roof beams anymore—we simply say *house*.

Yet, this house was constructed from those very components: wood, clay, water, and fire—the four great elements. Once assembled, we give it a conventional name: *house*.

You are being shown that within *form* (**rūpa**), there is no entity that can be called “mine.” One cannot maintain this body by saying, “Let my body be thus”, because it is *not-self* (**anattā**).

Just like a skeleton wrapped in tendons, smeared with flesh and blood, and covered with skin—once assembled, we call it *form*.

The Blessed One presents this kind of analogy to explain **rūpa**. So, what we call *form* is essentially this body, which arises from the four great elements (**mahābhūta**).

Let's look at the earth element (**paṭhavī dhātu**) first. It includes about twenty components that are coarse and solid in nature: Hair, body hair, nails, teeth, skin, flesh, sinews, bones, bone marrow, kidneys, heart, liver, diaphragm, lungs, intestines, faeces, brain, and so on.

Though these are all formed from the four great elements, their dominant characteristic is hardness and solidity—hence they are classified under the earth element.

Next, we consider the water element (**āpo dhātu**)—the flowing, cohesive aspect of the body. This includes bile, phlegm, pus, blood, sweat, tears, fat, oil, urine, and other fluids. Though these too arise from the four great elements, their dominant nature is liquidity and cohesion, so they are categorized under the water element.

Next, we consider the heat present in this body. The food and drink we consume are digested through bodily heat. Day by day, the body ages due to this heat. This heat is categorized into four types of fire element (**tejo dhātu**):

- **Santhappana tejo dhātu** – the warming heat
- **Paridahana tejo dhātu** – the burning heat
- **Pācika tejo dhātu** – the cooking/digestive heat
- **Jīraṇa tejo dhātu** – the aging/metabolic heat

this bodily heat arises from the four great elements, its dominant nature is heat—hence it is classified under the fire element.

Then we come to the air element (**vāyo dhātu**)—the movements and flows within the body.

- **Uddhaṅgamā vāta** – upward-moving air, which rises and exits through the digestive tract
- **Adhogamā vāta** – downward-moving air, such as intestinal gas
- **Kucchisayā vāta** – abdominal air that circulates within the stomach
- **Aṅgam-aṅgānu sārīnā vāta** – the air that enables movement of limbs, allowing us to walk, run, and gesture

These types of air help animate and mobilize the body's parts—they are functions of the air element. Additionally, there is the air that circulates blood throughout the body. This air flows through vessels—arteries and veins—supporting circulation. Even the breath we take in and release (**assāsa-passāsa vāta**) is part of this system. The very wave of inhalation and exhalation is intimately connected to the body. If our breath stops, the entire body becomes just like a lifeless log. After death, it disintegrates and returns to the earth. So, the very existence of this body is bound up with the *inhalation and exhalation winds* (**assāsa-passāsa vāta**).

They are intimately connected to the body. Now, this body is composed of 42 parts, grouped according to the four great elements:

- Earth element (**paṭhavī dhātu**) – 20 parts

- Water element (**āpo dhātu**) – 12 parts
- Fire element (**tejo dhātu**) – 4 parts
- Air element (**vāyo dhātu**) – 6 parts

When these 42 components come together, we conventionally call it a *form* (**rūpa**).

The Blessed One offers a vivid analogy: Imagine placing four wooden pillars upright. Then, horizontal beams are tied across like strips or slats. Ropes and bindings are added. Large posts are erected.

Next, clay and water are applied to form walls. Then, a roof beam is placed—perhaps made of wood. Windows and doors are crafted from wooden pieces. Finally, a roof is added—made from palm leaves or tiles, or whatever materials are available. All these components—wood, clay, water, fire—are derived from the four great elements. Each part has its own name, but once assembled, we simply call it a house.

Just like that, the body is a compound of elemental parts. Though we give it a single name—*form* or *body*—it is merely a collection of conditioned components.

The Blessed One explains the nature of *form* (**rūpa**), which arises from the four great elements:

“Monks, *form* is not-self (**anattā**). This *form* cannot be controlled or governed by oneself.” If there were a self within this *form*, if it truly belonged to us, then we would be able to maintain it as we wish. We could say, “Let my body be thus,” or “Let it not be thus,” and it would obey. But that is not the case.

If *form* were truly self, it would not be subject to suffering, affliction, or disease. It would not decay or disappear. But because *form* is impermanent and not-self, it is subject to aging, illness, and death.

We cannot command our body to stop aging. We cannot prevent it from falling ill. If there were a self, we could say, “Let my body not grow old,” or “Let it not become sick,” and it would comply. But we cannot.

Therefore, this body—composed of the four great elements—is not-self. That is why it ages, becomes ill, and eventually dies. Hair turns grey, skin wrinkles, the body shrinks, teeth fall out, and diseases arise. After death, the body decays and returns to the earth. All of this happens because the *form*, made of the four great elements, is not-self.

Thus, the Blessed One taught: contemplate deeply the not-self nature of form. This is the profound Dhamma the Buddha delivered to the group of five monks in that sacred place long ago.

Now, when the Blessed One teaches the Four Noble Truths, especially in the **Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta**, he explains how to understand them through:

- **Sacca ñāṇa** – knowledge of the truth
- **Kicca ñāṇa** – knowledge of the task to be done
- **Kata ñāṇa** – knowledge that the task has been accomplished

The Blessed One explains the Truth of Suffering (**dukkha sacca**) like this: “Birth is suffering. Aging is suffering. Not obtaining what one desires is suffering.” All of these *forms* of suffering arise due to not-self (**anattā**). Aging, illness, decay, and death occur because of impermanence (**anicca**). Because things are impermanent, suffering arises. And because suffering arises, it is not-self.

This follows the principle: “Whatever is impermanent is suffering; whatever is suffering is not-self.” If something is impermanent and causes suffering, and cannot be controlled, then it cannot be considered self.

The Blessed One elaborates on the Truth of Suffering and finally condenses it into five key aspects for realization:

“In, the five aggregates subject to clinging are suffering.” (**Saṅkhittena pañcupādānakkhandhā dukkhā**)

So, what is suffering in summary?
It is the five aggregates of clinging:

- Form (**rūpa**)
- Feeling (**vedanā**)
- Perception (**saññā**)
- Mental formations (**saṅkhāra**)
- Consciousness (**viññāṇa**)

Among these, the first aggregate is *form*, which arises from the four great elements. Due to ignorance (**avijjā**), we mistakenly perceive this form as permanent, pleasurable, and as self. But to progress on the path, this view must be abandoned.

The Blessed One reveals how perception is distorted (**saññā vipallāsa**): Even when we see a *form*, what we perceive and experience is shaped by ignorance. We see impermanent things as permanent (**anicca as nicca**), suffering as pleasure (**dukkha as sukha**), not-self as self (**anattā as attā**), and the unattractive as attractive (**asubha as subha**).

In truth, these things are impermanent, but we perceive them as lasting. They are suffering, but we perceive them as happiness. They are not-self, but we grasp at them as “mine.” We think: “Why can’t I keep my things the way I want?” We try to control what cannot be controlled, and so we attempt to maintain a self within what is not-self.

We even see the unattractive as beautiful—this too is a distortion. To overcome this ignorance-bound view, we must train ourselves to see:

- The impermanent as impermanent
- The painful as painful
- The not-self as not-self
- The unattractive as unattractive

That is why the Blessed One, in the sacred land of **Isipatana Migadāya**, taught the group of five monks this profound Dhamma: “Monks, this *form* is impermanent, it is suffering, it is not-self. It cannot be governed or maintained as one wishes.”

If there were a self, we could say, “Let my body be thus,” or “Let it not be thus.” But because there is no self, we age, fall ill, and experience physical suffering. All of this arises due to the not-self nature of form. This truth must be seen with deep wisdom.

Next, the Blessed One taught not only about *form* (**rūpa**), but also about feeling (**vedanā**): “Monks, this feeling too is not-self (**anattā**).” Feeling arises through contact (**phassa**) at the six sense bases. For example:

- Eye + form + consciousness → contact at the eye
- Ear + sound + consciousness → contact at the ear

- Nose + smell + consciousness → contact at the nose
- Tongue + taste + consciousness → contact at the tongue
- Body + touch + consciousness → contact at the body
- Mind + mental objects + consciousness → contact at the mind

Thus, contact arises at all six sense bases: eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind. And from this contact, three aggregates subject to clinging arise:

- Feeling (*vedanā*)
- Perception (*saññā*)
- Mental formations (*saṅkhāra*)

When the **eye** sees a visible form, a feeling arises. This happens when the eye, the form, and consciousness come together—this contact gives rise to feeling (**vedanā**).

Then, based on the seen form, we recognize it. This is called perception (**saññā**)—we identify whether it’s blue, yellow, red, a person, an animal, a tree, or something else.

Once perception arises, a volition (**cetanā**) emerges regarding what has been recognized. This is mental formation (**saṅkhāra**)—and it becomes **kamma**.

As the Buddha said: “*Monks, volition is **kamma***” (**cetanāhaṃ bhikkhave kammaṃ**).

So, based on the seen *form*, **kamma** begins to accumulate through volition.

Thus, from contact at the eye, we get:

- Feeling (**vedanā**) – the experience of seeing
- Perception (**saññā**) – recognizing what is seen
- Mental formation (**saṅkhāra**) – the volitional response

These are the three aggregates subject to clinging that arise in this process.

The Blessed One explains this same process with the **ear** and sound: When ear, sound, and consciousness come together, contact arises at the ear. From this contact, a feeling (**vedanā**) arises—an experience of hearing. Then, the heard sound is recognized—this is perception (**saññā**). And based on that recognition, a volition (**cetanā**) arises—this is mental formation (**saṅkhāra**). All of this happens in a single moment.

So, from hearing a sound, three aggregates subject to clinging arise:

- Feeling (**vedanā**) – the experience of hearing
- Perception (**saññā**) – identifying the sound

- Mental formation (**saṅkhāra**) – the volitional response to the sound

The same applies to the **nose** and smell: When nose, odour, and consciousness come together, contact arises at the nose. From this contact, a feeling arises—such as pleasure from a pleasant scent or discomfort from a foul odour. This feeling may lead to joy or irritation depending on the nature of the smell. Then, the smell is recognized—is it the scent of a flower? Perfume? Something else? And based on that recognition, a volition arises—this is mental formation. So again, through contact at the nose, the same three aggregates arise:

- Feeling (**vedanā**)
- Perception (**saññā**)
- Mental formation (**saṅkhāra**)

Next is the **tongue**. When we place something in the mouth, contact arises at the tongue—this means the tongue, taste, and consciousness come together. As a result, we experience a taste—this is feeling (**vedanā**). Then we recognize the taste—whether it's bitter, salty, sour, or sweet. This recognition is perception (**saññā**). Based on that, a volition (**cetanā**) arises regarding the taste—this is mental formation (**saṅkhāra**). So, when taste is experienced at the tongue, three aggregates subject to clinging arise: feeling, perception, and mental formation.

The same applies to the **body**. When the body experiences a sensation—such as comfort or discomfort—it’s due to the body, tactile object, and consciousness coming together. This contact gives rise to feeling, which is then recognized, and followed by volition. Again, the three aggregates arise.

And likewise with the **mind**. When we think of something, we say, “I thought of this,” or “I reflected on that.” This happens when mind, mental object, and consciousness come together. From this, mental feeling arises. Sometimes, while thinking deeply, we might smile to ourselves—why? Because a pleasant memory or idea has surfaced, bringing joy. Someone might ask, “Why are you smiling?” And we respond, “Oh, I remembered something funny.” That’s the process: a mental object is felt, then recognized, and finally volition arises—this is mental formation (**mano sañcetanā**).

So, across all six sense bases—eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind—this same pattern unfolds: Feeling → Perception → Volition, forming the aggregates subject to clinging.

We first spoke about *form* (**rūpa**). Now we consider the six sense bases—eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind. These six are all associated with *form* derived from the four great elements.

Thus, the Blessed One first taught:

“Monks, *form* is not-self (**anattā**). It is impermanent, suffering, and not-self. One cannot maintain it as one wishes, saying ‘Let my body be thus’ or ‘Let it not be thus.’ Therefore, it is not-self.”

Next, the Blessed One declared:

“Monks, not only *form*—feeling (**vedanā**) too is not-self.” Feeling arises through contact at the six sense bases. If there were a self within feeling, then one could control it—maintain only pleasant feelings and avoid unpleasant ones. But because feeling is impermanent and not-self, it arises and passes away beyond our control.

The Blessed One teaches: If there were a self within feeling (**vedanā**), then one could maintain it as desired. One could say, “Let my feeling be thus,” or “Let it not be thus,” and it would obey. In that case, feeling would never lead to affliction, pain, or suffering. There would be no discomfort—only pleasure. And truly, no one desires suffering.

People strive, labour, and endure hardship in pursuit of happiness. They seek comfort through effort and prayer. If it were possible to experience only pleasure through contact at the six sense bases, and if a self

truly existed, then no one would willingly choose suffering.

One could command: “Let me not experience pain.” “Let me experience only pleasure.” And it would happen.

But the Blessed One declares: Feeling is not-self (**anattā**). Therefore, one cannot maintain it as one wishes. We cannot command our feelings to be only pleasant or to avoid pain. Because feeling is impermanent, conditioned, and not-self, it arises and passes away beyond our control.

Next, the Blessed One teaches about perception (**saññā**): “Monks, perception too is not-self.”

We recognize visible forms through the eye, sounds through the ear, scents through the nose, tastes through the tongue, touch through the body, and mental objects through the mind.

All of these recognitions arise due to contact (**phassa**). Because of contact, we recognize what is seen by the eye, what is heard by the ear, what is smelled by the nose, and so on.

Since perception arises from contact, and contact itself is impermanent, perception too is impermanent.

However, the Blessed One explains that a person overwhelmed by ignorance (**avijjā**) mistakenly thinks: “This is me, this is mine, I can control this.” They believe perception can be maintained as permanent, and thus fall into the view of self (**attā ditṭhi**) regarding perception.

The Blessed One taught:

“Monks, perception (**saññā**) is not-self.” Perception arises from contact (**phassa**). When contact changes, perception also changes. Therefore, perception is impermanent, and because it is impermanent, it is not-self.

If there were a self within perception, then one could maintain it as desired. One could say, “Let my perception be thus,” or “Let it not be thus,” and it would obey.

In that case, perception would never lead to affliction. We would never perceive painful or disturbing forms. We would never suffer because of what we recognize.

But the Blessed One declared: This is not the case. We cannot maintain perception as we wish. Why? Because it arises from contact, and contact itself is impermanent. Therefore, perception is impermanent, and what is impermanent is subject to suffering. And what is subject to suffering cannot be self. Thus, perception is not-self.

The Blessed One further teaches: “Monks, volition (**cetanā**), which is mental formation (**saṅkhāra**), arises in dependence on the six sense bases.”

- Volition arises based on visible forms seen by the eye
- Based on sounds heard by the ear
- Based on scents perceived by the nose
- Based on tastes sensed by the tongue
- Based on tactile sensations felt by the body
- Based on thoughts and ideas arising in the mind

These volitions are what we call **kamma** (**karma**). It is through these volitional actions that we accumulate **kamma** and continue in **samsāra**—the cycle of birth and death.

The Blessed One explains: “Monks, whether one is a layperson or a renunciant, one should constantly reflect: ‘I am the owner of my **kamma**. I am the heir to my **kamma**. I am born of my **kamma**. I am related to my **kamma**. I am supported by my **kamma**. Whatever **kamma** I accumulate—good or bad—I shall inherit its results.’”

If one performs wholesome actions, one receives wholesome results. If one performs unwholesome actions, one receives unwholesome results.

But now, let us reflect: If there were truly a self within **kamma**, then one could say, “Let me receive only

pleasant results. Let me avoid all painful outcomes.” One could choose only the fruits of wholesome actions and reject the rest. But that is not possible—because **kamma** operates according to cause and effect, and the process is not-self (**anattā**).

The Blessed One teaches: “Monks, mental formations (**saṅkhāra**)—which include volition and **kamma**—cannot be maintained as one wishes. They are not-self (**anattā**).” Because of this not-self nature, when we experience the results of **kamma** (**vipāka**), we often ask: “Why is this happening to me?” We search for ways to escape, we cry, we grieve, we run in all directions trying to avoid the consequences. We chase after outcomes and look for ways to bypass them.

But the Blessed One points out: Volition (**cetanā**), which is **kamma**, is not-self. If there were a self within **kamma**, we could say: “Let my **kamma** be thus,” or “Let it not be thus,” and we could control it as we please.

Take the example of King **Ajātasattu**:

After committing a grave misdeed, (killing his father King **Bimbisāra**) King **Ajātasattu** went to the Buddha at **Veluvanārāma**, and in front of the **Gandhakuti**, he fell to the ground, weeping and lamenting.

He began visiting the Blessed One two or three times a day, seeking advice and trying to calm his mind. If **kamma** could be controlled at will, he could have said: “I’ve made a mistake, but let me not receive its painful result. Let me only receive the fruits of my good deeds. “But that’s not how **kamma** works.

If people truly had a self within volition, they would be able to govern **kamma** entirely—choosing only pleasant results and avoiding all painful ones. But because **kamma** is not-self, we must face its consequences as they arise.

The Blessed One declared: “Monks, mental formations (**saṅkhāra**) are not-self (**anattā**). These formations cannot be governed or maintained by oneself.”

When a volition (**cetanā**) arises and one performs a kammic action, its result (**vipāka**) may manifest in different ways:

- Some **kamma** yields results in this very life (**diṭṭha-dhamma-vedanīya vipāka**)
- Some **kamma** ripens in a future life (**upapajja-vedanīya vipāka**)
- Some **kamma** bears fruit in later lives, even leading to **Nibbāna** (**aparāpariya vipāka**)

But these results are not under our control. They are the consequences of actions performed in

past lives. Even if one is now virtuous and disciplined, past **kamma** may still ripen. If there were a self within **kamma**, then one could say: “Let my **kamma** be thus,” or “Let it not be thus,” and govern it as desired.

But the Blessed One taught: **Kamma** and its results are not-self. They arise due to causes and conditions, and cannot be maintained or altered at will.

Next, the Blessed One teaches:

“Monks, consciousness (**viññāṇa**) is not-self (**anattā**).” If consciousness were self, then one could maintain it as desired—saying, “Let my consciousness be thus,” or “Let it not be thus.” But that is not possible.

If there were a self within consciousness, then after death, we would be able to direct our rebirth as we wish. No one would be born into poverty, disability, or suffering. No one would fall into the four lower realms—hell, animal realm, ghost realm, or the realm of demons. No one would willingly choose such births.

Yet, some people even express strange wishes—saying they’d like to be a bird, flying freely through the sky, or that it would be better to be a pampered pet in a wealthy household than to live a difficult

human life. These are expressions of craving and misunderstanding.

But the Blessed One shows us: If consciousness were truly self, we could carry it through **samsāra** as we please. We could choose our rebirths, avoid suffering, and dwell only in pleasant realms. However, consciousness is not-self. That is why we are carried through **samsāra**, falling again and again into the four lower realms—as if they were our ancestral home.

Then the Blessed One taught in this manner, and one by one, the bhikkhus continued to ask questions—almost like a structured Q&A session. That was the Blessed One’s method.

Some discourses were delivered all at once, with the Dhamma explained directly. In others, the Blessed One would divide the teaching into parts and explain them step by step. Sometimes, he would reverse the approach—asking questions himself, and through the answers given, he would reveal the Dhamma to the listener.

In this way, the Blessed One asked the bhikkhus: “Bhikkhus, what do you think? Consider carefully and answer—Is *form* (**rūpa**) permanent or impermanent?” The bhikkhus replied, “Impermanent, Venerable Sir.”

Then the Blessed One asked again: “If it is impermanent, is it suffering or happiness?” “It is suffering, Venerable Sir.”

Then he asked: “If something is impermanent and suffering, is it fitting to regard it as ‘This is mine, this I am, this is my self’?” “No, Venerable Sir.”

Therefore, the Blessed One concluded: “This *form* is impermanent, it is suffering, and it is not-self. If it were self, you would be able to control it as you wish. But since you cannot, it is not-self.”

In the same manner, the Blessed One questioned the bhikkhus about *feeling* (**vedanā**), *perception* (**saññā**), *mental formations* (**saṅkhāra**), and *consciousness* (**viññāṇa**)—each component of the five aggregates subject to clinging.

The Buddha asked: “Bhikkhus, is *feeling* permanent or impermanent?” “If it is impermanent, is it suffering or happiness?” “If it is suffering, is it fitting to regard it as ‘This is mine, this I am, this is my self’?”

The bhikkhus, reflecting wisely, answered: “Feeling is impermanent, suffering, and not-self.”

Then the Blessed One continued with the remaining aggregates—perception, formations, and consciousness—asking the same sequence of

questions. Each time, the bhikkhus contemplated and replied with clarity: “These too are impermanent, suffering, and not-self.”

Thus, the Blessed One taught the nature of the five aggregates: They arise and pass away. They are not under our control. They are not-self.

He then offered further analysis of *form* (**rūpa**), saying: “This *form*, born of the four great elements, is impermanent, suffering, and not-self.”

Then the Blessed One asked: “Bhikkhus, this *form* (**rūpa**) applies across all three times—past, future, and present. If there was a form in the past, it too is impermanent, suffering, and not-self. The form presently existing, born of the four great elements, is also impermanent, suffering, and not-self. And any form that may arise in the future, as long as it is born of the four great elements, is likewise impermanent, suffering, and not-self.”

Thus, the Blessed One encouraged contemplation of impermanence through the lens of time. Next, he asked: “Whether internally or externally—whether this *form* arises within oneself or within another—it is still born of the four great elements. Therefore, it is impermanent, suffering, and not-self.”

Even if the *form* is coarse—such as the human body nourished by physical food—it is impermanent, suffering, and not-self. Even if the *form* is subtle—such as the bodies of divine beings or non-human entities—it is still impermanent, suffering, and not-self. Even the refined bodies of Brahmā gods, born in the Brahma realms, though subtle and radiant, are not exempt. Whether coarse or subtle, all form is subject to change, unsatisfactory, and devoid of self.

Next, the Blessed One asked: “Bhikkhus, whether *form* is considered inferior or superior, it is still subject to the same nature.” We commonly regard certain realms—such as the animal realm, the ghost realm, the demon realm, and hell—as inferior. Even if one is born in such a lowly place, the body that arises there is still composed of the four great elements. Therefore, it too is impermanent, suffering, and not-self. On the other hand, someone might think, “Ah, how marvelous the heavenly realms must be! Perhaps I could be born as a Brahmā god.” Yet even in those refined realms, the body is still formed from the four great elements. Though subtle and radiant, it is still impermanent, suffering, and not-self.

Then the Blessed One continued: “Whether far away or nearby, whether distant or close—if the body is formed from the four great elements, it is impermanent, suffering, and not-self.”

“All *form* (**rūpa**) is not mine, I am not that, it is not my self.”

Therefore, one should contemplate with clear and correct insight (**yathābhūta sammappaññā**)—developed through deep **vipassanā** wisdom. This means that one who has cultivated insight into form sees it through the lens of impermanence (**anicca**), suffering (**dukkha**), and non-self (**anattā**).

The Buddha taught that form should be contemplated in eleven ways, such as:

- By time: past, future, and present
- By location: internal and external
- By texture: coarse and subtle
- By quality: inferior and superior
- By proximity: far and near

In all these ways, one reflects: “This *form* is impermanent, suffering, and not-self.”

And not only *form* (**rūpa**), —feeling (**vedanā**), perception (**saññā**), mental formations (**saṅkhāra**), and consciousness (**viññāṇa**)—the entire set of five aggregates subject to clinging (**pañcupādānakkhandhā**) must be seen in these eleven ways.

Through well-developed insight, one realizes: “This is not mine. I am not this. This is not myself.” Thus, one contemplates non-self (**anattā**).

Then the Blessed One declared: If someone reflects in this way—with clear understanding—they begin to grow disenchanted with *form* (**rūpa**): “He becomes disenchanted with form (**rupasmim pi nibbindati**).”

Likewise, he becomes disenchanted with feeling (**vedanā**), perception (**saññā**), mental formations (**saṅkhāra**), and consciousness (**viññāṇa**).

When one truly understands that these five aggregates are impermanent, suffering, and not-self, disenchantment arises toward them.

This disenchantment leads to dispassion (**virāga**)—a fading of attachment. With dispassion comes release (**vimutti**)—the mind becomes liberated.

And once the mind is liberated, there arises the knowledge of liberation: “My mind is freed. I am released from the five aggregates subject to clinging.”

This is the knowledge of completion (**kr̥ta-ñāṇa**): The realization, “I have fully understood the Four Noble Truths.” With this wisdom, one ends the cycle of lowly births. One completes the path to **Nibbāna**.

There is nothing more to be done for awakening—
The mind is liberated from the five aggregates subject
to clinging. At that moment, when the Blessed One
finished delivering this sublime discourse,
the minds of the five bhikkhus—his first disciples—
were freed from all defilements and all taints.
Right there, in the sacred ground of **Isipatana**
Migadāya, the first five arahants in the world arose.
They had listened to the Blessed One’s teaching of
the **Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta**, and with its completion,
the noble lineage of arahants was born—in that
blessed place, for the first time in this world.



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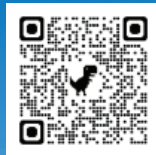
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THE SINGAPORE BUDDHIST MEDITATION CENTRE

No. 1, Jalan Mas Puteh, Singapore 128607

Tel: + 65 67783330, +65 94656570

weragodas1941@gmail.com